



SparkTank Education

A Strategic Approach to Group Decision-Making

In this application exercise we will:

- Cover the recipe for effective group decision-making in the Functional Group Decision-Making Theory.
 - These are the understandings the group must develop to find solutions that will help solve their problem.
- Learn about foundational principles that guide effective group decision-making.
- Explore different types of group decision-making procedures that follow Functional Group Decision-Making Theory and incorporate the guiding principles of group decision-making.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs of poor group decision-making.

Functional Group Decision-Making Theory

Functional Group Decision-Making Theory identifies a process for making decisions through five functions that have been found to increase the effectiveness and success of decision making. Groups whose communication fulfills all five functions are more effective in their decision making.

1. Understand the problem.
 - a. Groups must deliberate until they believe all members understand the nature and seriousness of the problem, its possible causes, and the consequences that could develop if the problem is not dealt with effectively.
2. Understand what constitutes an acceptable resolution.
 - a. Group members must understand the objectives that must be achieved to remedy the problem, or the specific standards that must be satisfied for the solution to be acceptable.
3. Develop realistic and acceptable alternatives.
 - a. Group members should avoid stopping the development of alternative solutions when they generate a suitable solution. This helps provide the best chance at finding the most effective solution to the problem.
4. Assess the positive qualities of alternatives.
 - a. Group members need to recognize the positive qualities of each alternative they find acceptable.
5. Assess the negative qualities of alternatives.
 - a. Group members need to recognize the negative qualities of each alternative they find acceptable.

Group Decision-Making Guiding Principles

Regardless of the procedure or process your group chooses, these four principles will improve your outcome in most group decision-making scenarios.

1. Group decision making is an evolutionary process. The final decision of the group emerges over time as a result of the clarification, modification, and integration of ideas that group members express in their interaction.
2. Group decision making is a circular rather than linear process. A complex decision is seen as a series of smaller decisions, not one large decision.
3. Many different types of influences affect a groups decision making. Group members' moods, motivations, competencies, and communication skills are individual-level variables that affect the groups final decision.
4. Decisions are made within a system of external and internal constraints.

Group Decision-Making Procedures

Each procedure can help groups be more effective at decision-making, but some procedures are better suited to address different parts of the decision-making process. We have provided procedures for a couple of the most effective ways for groups to solve problems together.

Group Decision-Making Procedure Quick Reference Table

	Understand the Problem	Understand what constitutes an acceptable resolution	Develop realistic and acceptable alternatives	Assess the positive qualities of alternatives	Assess the negative qualities of alternatives
Standard Agenda	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brainstorming	Somewhat	Yes	Yes	No	No
NGT	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consensus	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Voting	Depends on quality of group discussion before voting	Depends on quality of group discussion before voting	Depends on quality of group discussion before voting	Depends on quality of group discussion before voting	Depends on quality of group discussion before voting

Standard Agenda

Procedure:

1. Identifying the problem.
2. Analyze the problem.
3. Identify the minimal criteria for the solution.
4. Generate solutions.
5. Evaluate solutions and select one as the best fit.
6. Implement the solution.

Brainstorming

Procedure:

1. State as many alternatives as possible.
2. Encourage creative ideas.
3. Examine ideas that have been presented to see if they can be improved upon or combined with other ideas.
4. Accept all ideas without criticism.
5. Evaluate ideas after the idea generation phase is complete.

Consensus

Procedure:

1. Assign one group member to the role of coordinator to facilitate the discussion.
2. The coordinator uses ideas generated by members to formulate proposals acceptable to all members.
3. Assign a different group member to record each of the proposals
4. Throughout the discussion, the recorder reads back statements that reflect the agreements of the group.
5. The recorder reads aloud the final decision so members can give approval or modify the proposal.

Voting

Procedure:

1. Hold discussions to generate a clear proposal.
2. Decide how the vote will be taken.
 - a. Written ballot
 - b. Verbal vote
 - c. Show of hands
3. Decide how many votes are needed to win or decide an issue.
4. Restate the proposal before voting.

Symptoms of Poor Group Procedure and Strategy

1. The group has trouble staying focused on what is needs to accomplish.
2. The group has difficulty sticking to the meeting agenda.
3. The group performs superficial rather than detailed analyses of alternatives.
4. The groups' members have little motivation for working on this decision or the group has fallen into a rut.

5. The group relies on the perceived expert or the person who seems to care the most about the problem.
6. Group members consider one alternative and then drop it for discussion of the of the next alternative without comparing alternatives.
7. Group members go straight to decision making without problem solving.
8. The group accepts the first solution mentioned.
9. The group fails to think of a complex decision as a series of smaller decisions.
10. Group members make a choice without evaluating its merits.



Definitions provided by Oxford Languages

Our Dictionaries: Oxford Languages. (n.d.). Retrieved September 23, 2020, from <https://languages.oup.com/dictionaries/>

Theory and Procedure

Principles of management. (2015). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.
Beebe, S. A., Mollet, T. P., & Roach, D. (2013). *Training & Development: Communicating for Success, 2nd Edition.* Pearson.